



Oregon
Department
of Agriculture

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How Oregon's land use system helps Oregon agriculture



Without agriculture, there would be little food to eat. This may seem an over-simplistic statement, but all too often our society, through policy choices, legislative actions, zoning, and personal actions, relegates agriculture to second-class status in economic and environmental decision-making. The world has a limited supply of land with high quality soils on which food can be grown. In less than 25 years, an expanding world population will require 2-3 times the amount of food we are currently able to produce. Due to the increased conversions of farmland to industrial and urban uses, the needed food production must occur on an ever-smaller portion of land.

Agriculture is also a key component of the state's economy. The farm gate value of Oregon agriculture was \$5.4 billion in 2013. Production agriculture and its associated industries contributed nearly \$29 billion in 2013. This represents 15% of the state economy and 12% of the state's workforce. 80% of this production leaves the state. In effect, Oregon agriculture represents a traded sector component to the state's economy bringing new money into the state.

Key to maintaining this very important economic player, protecting the land base, the ability for farmers to operate and protecting water and other agriculture infrastructure needs. Between 1959 and 2012, Oregon lost over 4.9 million acres (23%) of farmland. The Willamette Valley, home to 70% of the state's population, also contains most of prime farmland in the state (71%). It's a case of competing interests. People want to live in locations where other people and services are congregated, but those are areas where the best soils exist. The most populous counties are among the most productive agriculture areas; Marion, Clackamas, Linn, Washington, Yamhill, and Polk counties, all located in the Willamette Valley, are six of the top ten agriculture counties in Oregon. Strict land use planning for preservation of agriculture land is monumentally important in protecting the remaining farmland from conversion.

For more than 40-years, Oregon has maintained a strong policy to protect farmland. This policy was adopted by the state legislature in 1973.

The Legislative Assembly finds and declares that:

- Open land used for agriculture is a vital natural and economic asset for all the people of the state.
- Preservation of a maximum amount of agricultural land, in large blocks, is necessary to maintain the agricultural economy of the state and for the assurance of adequate, healthful, and nutritious food.
- Expansion of urban development in rural areas is a public concern because of the conflicts between farm and urban activities.
- Incentives and privileges are justified to owners of land in exclusive farm use zones because such zoning substantially limits alternatives to the use of rural lands. (ORS 215.243)

The main tool for carrying out that policy is the Statewide Planning Program. Oregon's Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC) sets standards for such planning. The cities and counties then apply them through local comprehensive plans and land-use ordinances. Under this system, all counties in Oregon have adopted planning and zoning measures to protect agricultural land. Statewide Planning Goal 3, "Agricultural Lands" requires all agricultural lands to be inventoried and preserved by adopting exclusive farm use zones. Local counties are responsible for planning and zoning, subject to approval by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). Allowable non-farm uses are incorporated into local zoning regulations.

Technical assistance

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Land use

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